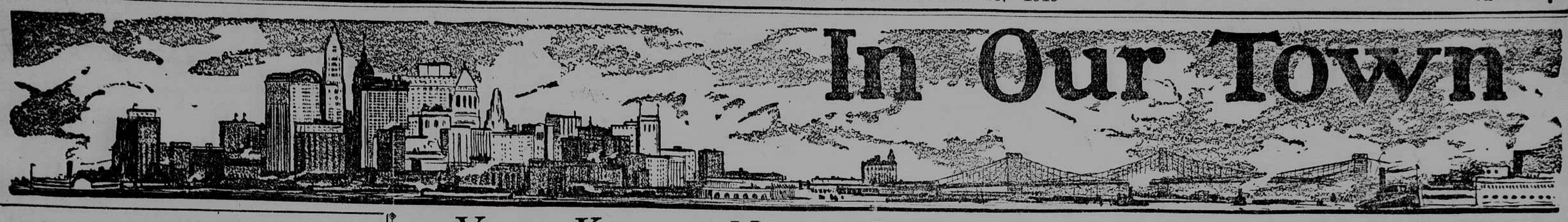


At Our Political Teas

THESE are the days of political teas. The fact is the political tea, if men would only take it seriously, is menacing the very foundations of what they regard as their unassailable citadel, and the gentle ladies squeezing lemon into their teacups are preparing a nice acidulated brew for the future delectation of the male.

A mere man wanderingly inadvertently into one of the teas that preceded the election would have had the shock of his life had he been able to hear what was going on without making his presence known. Of course, a woman's tea is no place for a man, any more than the saloon is—or was—the place for a woman.

It is true that an occasional unfortunate is inveigled toward the tea table because he has rashly promised to say a little piece. In his campaign of educating women on the problems of the day it is sometimes necessary to rope in a political expert to disentangle the intricacies he has helped to evolve.

With the macaroons and the china reposing invitingly on a spindling table before him, the bold politician begins his speech. He talks down to his audience. This is the sad part of the political tea. The women sigh about it. Perhaps it's the proximity of the teacups and the eternal association of tea and feminine chatter in the mind of the male. Anyway, he makes a pretty little speech with many references to the power, the influence and the charm of the fair sex. He brazenly wraps his every sentence in sugar-coating. Maybe he talks a little about politics in a patronizing fashion before the end of his discourse; more likely he doesn't.

A political lion is just as good as any other to have at a tea. Of course he isn't as picturesque as an author or an artist; but then he knows how to handle his audience. The only time he feels really at home at the political tea is while he is in action. Here he is on his own ground. But the minute he concludes his peroration and a polite ripple of handclapping mingled with the babble of many voices, soft and strident, breaks loose, he remembers how big and clumsy his hands and feet are; how corpulent his vest; how thin the hair on top of his head.

He is presented with a delicate teacup, which he nervously balances in an equally delicate saucer. He is given a morsel of cake, which he holds for show while he talks to twenty women clamoring at once. He finally swallows it at one fell swoop, just as Miss Gurgle asks him what he thinks of the new income tax. He poises himself dexterously first on one leg and then on the other. And as soon as he can safely do so, he makes a dive for the door, dodging questions at every step and bowing amiably right and left with an effective air of finality.

Whew! The pink and the purple periods are over. The air becomes blue, not with smoke—oh, no, they don't smoke cigarettes at political teas—but with ideas. They begin to exchange notes on what the gallant gentleman has told them. How wise they feel! And then they go home and unload it all on poor, long-suffering hubby, who wishes to God that pink teas still were the fashion instead of political pow-wows.

The Meeting Over Here

HE CAME back from France with four decorations before he could vote or even needed to use a razor. Naturally he was reasonably proud of his laurels, though in the modest way of the average doughboy. He just "happened to be there," "any one else would have done the same," and "he was lucky to come through with a whole skin," he said.

More than his decorations he prized the fact that he had been a member of the Foreign Legion. This distinction consisted not only in that many of its members began fighting for France before the United States actually entered the war, but also in a peculiar custom of the American members of the legion.

Deeming themselves fitly the finest of their kind, modern knights of chivalry and adventure, willing to undertake any hopelessly desperate enterprise, the Legionaires had sworn an awful oath. They had individually chosen members of the Prussian Guard as their mortal enemies, and had vowed to have the life of one or more members of the guard in individual combat.

Often while waiting the zero hour

he had looked forward to the exact moment of meeting. From others he had learned how the Guardsmen might be told, not only by their peculiar method of attack, but also by their unique uniforms, particularly the decorated helmet.

The decorations he brought home with him amply testified to an intimate acquaintance with the Boche with hand grenade, pistol and bayonet, but in all his action it so happened that never to his knowledge did he meet a member of the Prussian Guard. The one thing he would have boasted about he was unable to boast, and his disappointment, in warrior's vein, was very keen.

The armistice and subsequent demobilization prevented the complete extinction of the guard. He returned late last summer to Broadway and stepped as from a dream back into his accustomed place about a local theater, and became Hardwikke Nevin, civilian again and press agent.

One day soon after his return he noticed a rather taciturn doorman who looked oddly foreign. The fellow was winning enough and evidently knew a good deal about shifting scenery, but clearly he was a stranger even among the millions of foreign-born in New York.

Something about the fellow's stiff bearing recalled a certain July afternoon when the German tide was turned back from the Marne. He approached the stagehand and asked if he was not a German.

"Yes," the other admitted in broken English.

"How long have you been over here?"

"Three weeks."

"How did you get here?"

"Slipped in through Holland and then by ship."

"Were you in the German army?"

"Yes."

"What division?"

"The Prussian Guard."

The Legionary started back, utterly nonplused. At last, his sworn enemy!

Memories of days in the trenches and nights in No Man's Land flashed back over him as he had never thought possible, so far away and dreamlike the past had already begun to be. Was he dreaming, or was he really in civvies and back home?

Yes, there was the stage, beyond it the yawning gloom of the orchestra, and outside a street organ was playing "Bubbles." And the two of them both out of uniform. But the treaty of peace was not yet signed, and——

The ex-Guardsman spoke, breaking in upon the other's feverish train of thought.

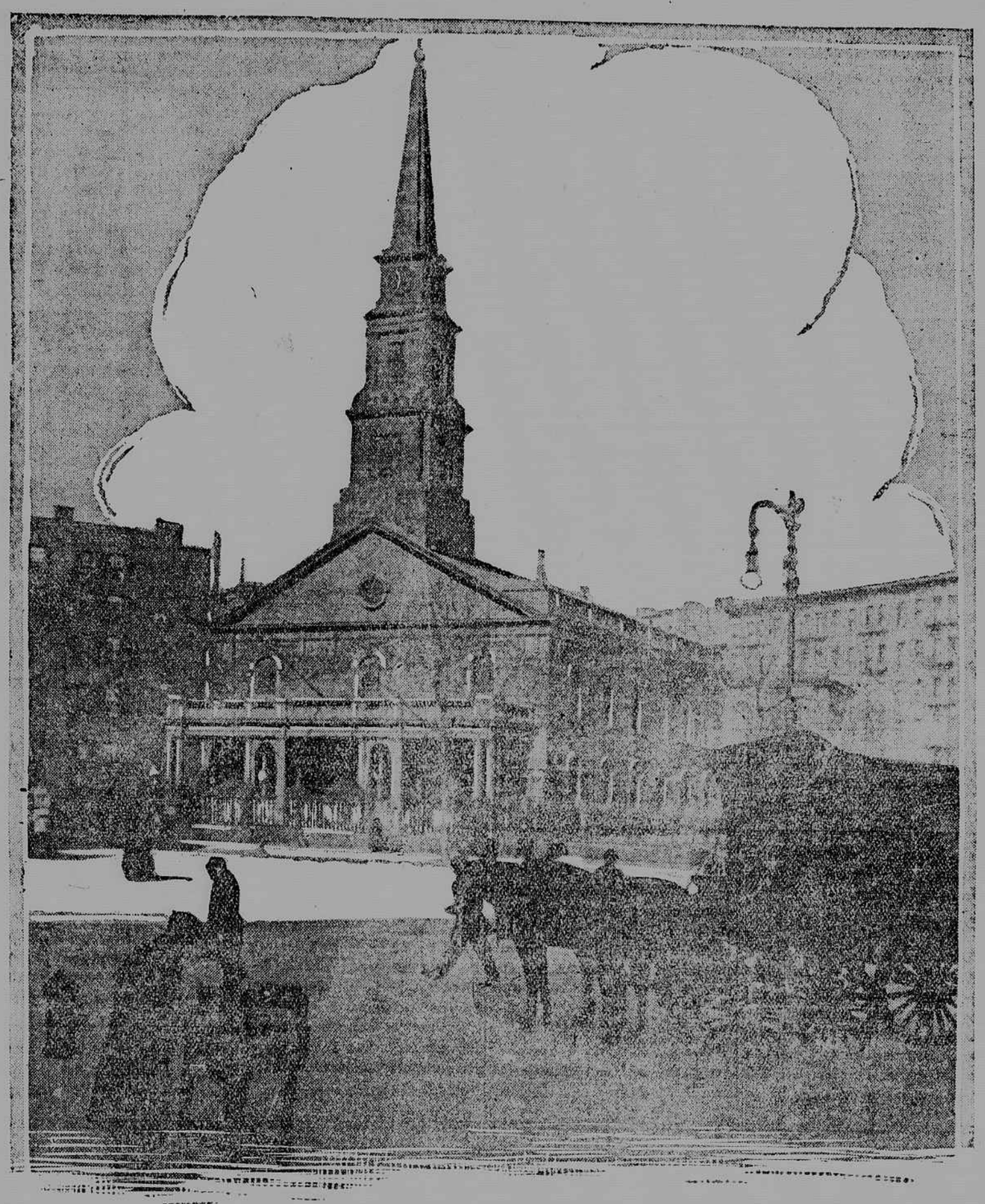
"Got a fag?"

Fritz doubtless remembered hearing how generous the Americans were with their cigarettes with captured Germans. So it was a very much astonished ex-Guardsman who, instead of getting a fag, saw a slim young man in front of him suddenly burst out into ironical laughter, turn on his heel and stride away as if he had never heard a word.

You Know New York, But—

Do You Know These Glimpses of It?

5



YOU really should brush up on your history if you don't know something about this one. It is St. Mark's Church (Stuyvesant Place near 10th Street and Second Avenue), one of the city's oldest churches. In its east wall is set the tombstone of Peter Stuyvesant, the wooden-legged hero who was the last of New Amsterdam's four Dutch Governors in Colonial times. In 1644 he planted a pear tree at 13th Street and Third Avenue, "by which his name might still be remembered." It thrived for 200 years.

—Photograph and text by Charles Phelps Cushing.

What Is To Be the Fate of Those German Bands?

NOW that German opera singers have finally concluded that New York doesn't want to hear them, there is time for reflection on the possible fate of the little German bands of street players who used to tootle about New York in ante-bellum days.

There were a dozen such organizations then, consisting of from three to five players (it requires no great effort to refrain from calling them musicians), and so industrious were they that any apartment dweller in the five boroughs would have cast aside scruples against betting and wagered his unopened pay envelope that every other man in the street devoted a part of his waking moments to scraping or blowing in a German band.

They were ubiquitous. A man would be awakened by "Die Wacht am Rhein" in the morning, and, while blustering and condemning them as a nuisance, would secretly take joy in the fact that martial music was speeding his reluctant fingers through clothes-buttoning and shoelacing, adding an extra minute to his allotted time for newspaper reading at the breakfast table. Sometimes he'd toss two or three pennies out of the window and shamefacedly withdraw from sight before the coins had been expertly netted in the hat of the coin collector below.

At noon, when the flat dweller left his office for a hurried glass of beer and a plate of free lunch, a German band would be there with the cadence of some German drinking song. The drinker wouldn't feel impelled to drop anything in the hat of the band's collector that time, because he'd know the players were simply working out their meal at the free lunch counter.

Then when he'd return home at night there would be a German band, perhaps the very same German band, playing "The Blue Danube"—and how they could play it! To one who can't distinguish do, re, me from fa, sol, la, when played on a steam calliope that was the very essence of music; and if potatoes were scorched, or somebody needed new shoes, it didn't necessarily mean that somebody was always taking the joy out of life.

Some days were red letter occasions on the calendars of the German bandsmen. One such was the birthday of George Ehret, the brewer. An accurate census of German bands could have been made at the Ehret brewery and Ehret home on Mr. Ehret's natal day. The leaders of the little groups of players must have had the date pasted in the crowns of their hats, for none of them ever failed to serenade the old man.

Mr. Ehret was seventy-seven in April, 1912. Early in the morning the aged brewer was awakened by "The Blue Danube." He looked out of the window, counted the musicians and sent them six $1 bills and a blanket pass into the brewery.

Then he started to dress. Before he had reached his shoes there was another band. They started off with "Die Wacht am Rhein" and then switched into "The Blue Danube." Mr. Ehret counted eight musicians this time and sent the leader that many $1 bills and the usual magic pass to the brewery.

This kept up, with hardly a break, all through the morning, and when Mr. Ehret went to his office he found that a German band had anticipated his arrival. After he had dispensed about $200 in $1 bills, and several vats of beer had been drained, some sharp-eyed employee of the brewery, who was becoming weary of the endless playing of the two tunes, discovered that individuals in the different bands were repeaters. When the band departed it was followed. At a saloon in Second Avenue there were congregated the members of eight German bands. There it was discovered that after these had each serenaded Mr. Ehret once, a financial genius among them had contrived a schedule of combinations, so that an endless variety of little German bands was kept on the road between the Second Avenue saloon and the brewery.

When Mr. Ehret returned home that night he was accompanied by a husky driver of one of his big trucks. There was a German band waiting in the area entrance. The driver talked with them briefly. Then the band vanished, and through the rest of the night two policemen remained on guard, to see that Mr. Ehret was allowed to celebrate his birthday in something like a normal fashion.

There have not been any licenses issued to German street bands since 1915. That was the year the Lusitania was sunk. Perhaps it is just a coincidence, but it is better than an even bet that the next time a German band plays in New York it will carry a large and vivid sign bearing these words. "The Little Czecho-Slovakian Players," or even "The Jugo-Slovak Band."

Shave? Manicure?

A MOONLIT garden is a far better setting for a romance than a Nassau Street barber shop. No author would take a shiny hatbox of a barber shop, just off Fulton Street, as the place for a meeting and mating. Only a teller of true city tales, a guy who didn't know the writing rules, would do that.

For more than three years Frank was the best and smilingest barber in the mirrored aperture of Nassau Street's wall of assorted enterprise which is the scene of all the acts of this piece.

A man who worked downtown also shaved downtown, because Frank was there. This man used to get shaves and haircuts uptown, but once he had been too late to get a shave in the morning and had gone during the noon place into the place where Frank worked. Frank was so smiling, so efficient and so all-around a good barber that he made a regular patron of the transient. A little girl named Mae—no manicurist spells it with a final "y"—made his nails look like a débutante's, even though he had been tending the furnace this morning.

The man was married and had a baby, which, according to the man, was filled with dry humor, so his interest in Mae never left his finger tips. He liked to sit opposite her occasionally, just as any man likes to sit opposite any pretty girl, no matter how cute the things his baby says.

A little more than two years ago the man got a much better offer from a firm uptown, and, as his baby needed a new crib and lots of toys, he took it. As he lived on Washington Heights and had no relatives in Brooklyn he seldom, or never, came downtown.

One day last week his old boss called him downtown, asked how much he was getting uptown, added $20 a week to that figure, and told him to report on Monday. The man's wife wanted a new fur coat, so he reported.

He ate in a restaurant over a saloon on Beekman Street, where he had eaten in the old days. He missed the good beer they used to have. He looked over the new cupola on the City Hall and watched the crowds which made a carpet of breadwinners on Nassau Street. He rubbed his chin—reflectively, the authors call it—and felt the need of a shave. Frank—he remembered quickly and pleasantly. He recalled Mae, too, a bit sheepishly, because they had honestly been almost friends with him and he hadn't dropped downtown to see them once in two years.

The old barber shop looked the same, except for a new second chair and a new man behind. The proprietor, small, stout and Italian, had a hearty greeting for his long missing patron.

"Where's Frank?" the man asked. The little proprietor, being Latin and expressive, hunched his shoulders till the edges of them were as high as his ears, while he held his hands over his paunchy midriff, palms front. It was the Sicilian gesture denoting doubt and sorrow.

"Frank went to war," he said, simply. "No exemption, he just went. October, I think, two years ago. First to Yaphank. Upton, you know, then to France. He's buried there some place."

The little proprietor was affected deeply, the man saw. He was shaking his head as though he were saying "no" emphatically. He must have liked Frank.

"But Mae—where's she?" the man asked.

The little proprietor turned away. He seemed not to want to talk much. The bootblack, also a veteran in the shop's service, spoke up.

"You know," he said, sort of puzzled, "Frank, before he go, marry Mae. She read his letter to us firs'. Then none come. Two day, t'ree—mebbe week or mont', he don't write, she tell us."

The bootblack added, in effect, that after six weeks without letters she had suddenly disappeared from the shop. The boss went to her house, the bootblack said, because he didn't like to see her cry. The boss waited for more than four hours, according to the best information the bootblack had, but she didn't come home.

The boss still goes there, mostly on Sunday afternoons, the bootblack added, but the landlady who answers the doorbell always shakes her head and says she hasn't returned as yet.

Not Waiting for Trains

BACK in the home town from which many of us have come hanging around the station to "see the train come in" was, of course, an honorable and popular diversion. One would not expect this custom to prevail here, where the arrival of a train is signalized only by a wild and tinny rumbling somewhere in the depths of the structure and an eleventh hour line flashed on the bulletin board to the effect that train No. 27 is arriving at the other end of the terminal after all. Yet at most hours of the day the New Yorkers in the waiting rooms of Manhattan's two great terminals outnumber the passengers.

They do not, it is true, come to see the trains come in or go out: reverberating announcements that the Philadelphia express will leave on Track 12 cause no emotion among them; the shabby man whose newspaper has fallen on the floor and whose hat obscures one eye sleeps on; the two ladies who simply can't decide who is to pay for that lunch debate with undiminished vigor; the tired shopper's child continues his shrill "Beep-beep-beep," which represents, to his mind, the whistle of tthe Broadway Limited on rounding the Horseshoe Curve, and over in the corner a lounge lizard finishes explaining how he "slipped the cashier a dime on top of the check and a quarter under it and got 70 cents worth of grub for 35 cents that day."

All this talk of the need of a civic center seems superfluous after one long and earnest gaze into these warm marble halls, bigger than the throne room of Cleopatra, and modeled, indeed, in the case of the Pennsylvania, after the famous public baths of ancient Rome. Here, under the replicas of the walls where Cæsar met his friends of an afternoon, now linger Mr. Bangs, of Harlem, and Mrs. Bings, of Brooklyn, elbowing amiably with Red Duggins, of Oklahoma, and Cy Higgins, of Vermont.

One has to stand in most hotel lobbies, where the seats are always occupied by retired horse dealers from the West and the kind of organism which all morning writes letters to itself, care of the mail clerk, and all afternoon sits reading them. Therefore one goes to the station, where there is always room.

Commuters rush madly through the hall—ah, not for them are these long benches, with comfortable reclining backs. Chicagoans and Pittsburghers pant wearily in an effort to keep up with the porters, who, with their baggage, are rapidly disappearing in the dim vista of the concourse beyond; incoming voyagers, their eyes blinking in becoming astonishment at the city's wonders, stumble past.

But the New Yorker sits on, finishing his pipe or waiting for his date, catching up on her knitting or wondering where to go for tea.

Who says the New Yorker is a rushing, restless creature? Just look into the waiting room!